

The Nuremberg Trials

November 1945 - October 1946

“Don’t you see, we SS men were not supposed to think about these things: it never even occurred to us. – And besides, it was something already taken for granted that the Jews were to blame for everything... We just never heard anything else. It was not just newspapers like *Der Stuermer* but it was everything we ever heard. Even our military and ideological training took for granted that we had to protect Germany from the Jews... It only started to occur to me after the collapse that maybe it was not quite right, after I had heard what everybody was saying... We were all so trained to obey orders without even thinking that the thought of disobeying an order would simply never have occurred to anybody and somebody else would have done just as well if I hadn’t... You can be sure that it was not always a pleasure to see those mountains of corpses and smell the continual burning. – But Himmler had ordered it and had even explained the necessity and I really never gave much thought to whether it was wrong. It just seemed a necessity.”

Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Hoess

Was a crime committed?

- ✱ In your group, discuss this question. IF you believe a crime was committed - name it. What laws were violated?

Nazi Defence Argument

- * Superior Orders - “only following orders”
- * Defence of Country/State of Emergency - “we were at war and defending ourselves”
- * Legal Justification - “German law allowed us to do this”
- * Self-Preservation - “I would have been executed if I had not obeyed”

Group Work:

- ✱ Imagine you are one of the judges in Nuremberg - respond (in writing) to the Nazi arguments. Were these valid arguments (would you accept them)? Why or why not?
- ✱ What is appropriate punishment for these crimes?
- ✱ Are Nazi ideas dangerous? What should be done to prevent their spread?